



Protect your students from flu

New influenza (flu) recommendations

Flu shots are recommended for children ages 6 months to 18 years. School-age children have the highest rates of illness. Studies have shown this group is more likely to transmit the flu to older adults, babies and family members who cannot be vaccinated (such as babies younger than 6 months).

The flu virus can be spread before the onset of symptoms. Symptoms of the flu may include fever, chills, muscle aches, fatigue, cough, headache, nasal congestion, sore throat and sometimes stomach upset. These symptoms can potentially lead to more severe complications.

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) provides the most comprehensive information for the 2008-2009 flu season. Recommendations for the flu season change each year. It is important to educate yourself yearly about which flu vaccines are recommended for certain students or patients and which flu vaccines are contraindicated or suboptimal for certain groups.

For specific details about the 2008 recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, review the [Prevention and Control of Influenza MMWR Report](#). The CDC recommends a three-part protection strategy against the flu--immunization, prevention practices and antiviral medication.

Immunization

The flu vaccine is safe and effective. Either trivalent inactivated influenza vaccine (TIV) or live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) can be used for healthy people ages 2 to 49 years.

Child flu vaccination guidelines

- Children from 6 months to 2 years of age should only receive the inactivated vaccine (TIV).
- Children with possible reactive airways disease and those with underlying medical conditions should only receive the inactivated vaccine (TIV).
- Children from 6 months to 8 years of age should receive two doses of flu vaccine (doses separated by four or more weeks) if they are receiving the vaccine for the first time.

Flu season in the U.S. can last from November to March, and flu shots may be given until May. While it is most beneficial to get the flu shot as early as possible, it is never too late to get vaccinated. Side effects of the flu vaccine are mild. There may be soreness at the injection site, aches or low-grade fever. These symptoms occur as the body is developing immunity and are much less severe than the flu. If a person gets the flu after being vaccinated (for example, a different strain from what is covered in the vaccine), the disease will be less severe and will have a shorter duration.

Prevention Practices

Handwashing is extremely important to reduce the spread of disease. Follow these effective handwashing steps:

- Wet hands with running water.
- Place soap in palms and vigorously rub together for 20 seconds to make a lather.
- Rinse.
- Turn the faucet off by using a disposable paper towel, if possible.
- Dry hands with a disposable paper towel--not on clothing.

- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Young children may need your assistance with washing their hands.

Handwashing alone will not prevent flu. Even if a person does not have symptoms of the flu, the infection can still be transmitted to others. Along with good hand hygiene practices, prevent infection by doing the following:

- Get the flu vaccine.
- Avoid contact with eyes, nose and mouth.
- Throw tissues in the trash after use.
- Recommend school staff to wipe down commonly used surfaces--such as the computer keyboard and mouse, toys, desks and doorknobs--with antibacterial wipes/disinfectants frequently.
- Avoid sharing community crayons and pencils.
- Stay home if sick, especially with a fever.
- Ask staff who have the flu to stay home from work.
- Ask families to keep sick children home from school.

Visit our Web site for a "[Too Sick for School](#)" tip sheet, also available in [Spanish](#).

Antiviral Medication

Antiviral medication can reduce the amount of time a person is sick by one or two days and also can reduce contagiousness. Antiviral medication is recommended for anyone older than age 1 and must be taken within 48 hours of getting the flu to be effective. Antibiotics only fight bacterial infections; the flu is caused by a virus, not bacteria. Antiviral medication can only be prescribed by a doctor and is not sold over the counter.

National Influenza Vaccination Week is Dec. 8 to 14

Now is a great time to plan awareness activities for school staff and families. Find ways to make getting the vaccine more convenient. Contact the local public health department. Send e-cards to invite school staff to get the flu vaccine and to read about influenza. For more resources about influenza, visit the following Web sites:

- Myths and Facts: www.fluvaccinationchallenge.com
- Ideas for successful campaigns: www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/flu_hcw.htm
- 2008-2009 Prevention and Control of Influenza Recommendations: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr57e717.pdf
- For patients and healthcare professionals: www.preventinfluenza.org
- Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition: www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org
- Guidelines for Pregnant Women: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/preg-guide.htm

Register for upcoming [conferences](#) at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

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